UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1997/NGO/32
14 March 1997

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-third session
Agenda item 6

QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION OF THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Written statement submitted by North-South XXI, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[4 March 1997]

1. With few exceptions, the economic and social situation of African countries is steadily worsening. All of Africa is marginalized on the world market, where it accounts for only a small percentage of trade. The majority of public assistance and private investment is allocated to a very small number of States. Even these "beneficiary" countries are experiencing growth unaccompanied by social improvement or genuine development. No African State has even partial control of its development policy. The industrial Powers and international financial institutions are taking on that role in all areas, including that of currency.

2. Africa is also suffering from the competition and rivalry between the major Powers, which are in the process of re-establishing their spheres of influence in a repetition of the practices of the nineteenth-century Berlin Congress. The African peoples, already undermined by the problems resulting from inter-ethnic relations, are exploited by Powers outside the continent which provoke conflicts, such as those in Nigeria and Zaire, and even genocide, as in Rwanda. The dismantling of the African State and public

GE.97-10953 (E)

services in Somalia, Liberia, Zaire and other countries is continuing and facilitates additional interference that benefits only transnational firms or business-client networks.

3. Despite the prevailing state of abject poverty, there is considerable South-North cash flow, even to the point of financing some Western political parties which, in exchange, provide the (sometimes military) means of stabilizing the position of pseudo-elite leaders. Genuine progress in the fields of human rights and democracy is impossible in such a context. Democratic institutions, when established, are often subverted, as when elections are rigged or a multi-party system merely follows the pattern of a multi-ethnic society.

4. The Powers consider democracy to be a product capable of being imported and exported; only one "model" for political systems is proposed, and often imposed, in Africa even though it is inconsistent with the continent's culture, history and socio-economic reality. The imposition of democracy as a condition for agreements between European and African States is, in fact, just another attack on the principle of sovereignty, even if it serves the purposes of some opposition groups.

5. Overall, the African peoples are the victims of these aberrations: they seek, by the only means available to them, to escape armed conflicts (resulting in a mass of uprooted and unwelcome refugees), repression (increasing restrictions are being placed on the right to asylum in Europe) and abject poverty (the informal economy continues to develop, thereby contributing to great inequality and the disruption of all aspects of social activity). The judicial system is still in search of a code capable of inspiring the necessary confidence on the part of those accused, and usually the rule of law is merely a concept, particularly in view of the widespread corruption.

6. While there are many endogenous causes of the situation of human rights in Africa, it is the African peoples who are best able to deal with and overcome them. But such progress will be possible only if the exogenous causes are removed, which implies debt cancellation, reconsideration of structural adjustment policies dictated by financial institutions according to a standard model, military and political non-interference, the occupation of political posts by Africans, and genuine cooperation, both North-South and intra-African, on the basis of mutual interests.

7. Criticism of repressive practices in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa does little to advance the cause of human rights and sometimes serves to legitimize the racism which is becoming increasingly widespread in Europe. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights can best contribute to the cause of human rights in Africa by promoting knowledge of the fundamental causes of the situation of human rights on that continent and by making known the relationship between the endogenous and exogenous causes of practices that constitute violations of human rights and the rights of peoples, thereby making it possible to identify the respective responsibilities of Africans themselves, and non-Africans, for the fate of peoples.